The Down and Dirty Guide to Hats, Sticks, Vestments, etc.

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This is a quick guide to the basics. Anglicans in general, and Episcopalians in particular, have no laws in such matters. Just as there are a wide variety of uses of the Book of Common Prayer, each bishop enjoys wide latitude with respect to when and how to follow commendable liturgical and sacramental practice.

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Because very little can be said to be right or wrong, that doesn’t mean that it is impossible to determine best practices from the standpoint of the tradition, the prayer book, and present-day trends in liturgical renewal. These guidelines attempt to be sensitive to our inheritance and good practice without being rigid or doctrinaire.

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Let’s start with vestments.

1. From the beginning of The Episcopal Church, two traditions of “raiment for the Lord’s Service” have been prevalent among us. For bishops these two traditions parallel the traditions of presbyteral vesture: choir habit and eucharistic vestments.

2. Until the mid-1950’s, choir habit for bishops was the “magpie,” (so named because those wearing them looked like birds of the same name) and are similar to a rochet and chimere except that the chimere was black and generally less fulsome when it came to pleats, i.e., a flatter, simpler garment. (You will see many portraits of bishops of earlier generations decked out in their magpies.) Tippets were generally not worn with magpies.

3. The desire for red or scarlett chimeres for Episcopal bishops seems to have picked up speed at the 1958 Lambeth Conference where many English (and Commonwealth) bishops had red chimeres and most of the bishops of the rest of the Anglican Communion were wearing black magpies. The red or scarlett chimere is an adaptation of an Oxbridge doctoral gown, red indicating the wearer of the gown is a doctor of something, normally of theology, but also doctor of divinity (which is still an earned degree in many British universities; a doctor of divinity conferred *honoris causa*, is largely an American practice). It quickly became the practice of Episcopal seminaries to award, nearly automatically, honorary doctor of divinity degrees to affiliated bishops thereby bestowing upon them all the “rights, privileges, and responsibilities thereto appertaining,” which basically means a red chimere.

4. The rochet and chimere is choir habit. It is classically worn over a purple cassock, and unadorned, i.e., usually without a tippet and always without a stole (more on this later). It is appropriate attire for non-eucharistic occasions, baccalaureate and commencement addresses, and occasions when one may be preaching or officiating, but not presiding. Bishops in the Episcopal Church will generally wear rochet and chimere when ‘in attendance” at events at which they have no role except to be there and vested. This includes attendance at the ordinations of bishops when one is not a co-consecrator, the funerals of episcopal colleagues, the liturgies of General Convention, etc.

5. At points in our history, generally before the middle of the 19th century, it was not unusual for Episcopal presbyters to celebrate the eucharist in choir habit (cassock and surplice) and tippet. In the second half of the 19th century, colored stoles gradually replaced the tippet as standard practice in most places. Even though eucharistic vestments (alb, stole, chasuble) were not unknown among us from the beginning (Seabury had them!), their use has been nearly universally restored in the second half of the 20th century. While the continued use of choir vestments is widespread in The Episcopal Church for assisting priests, deacons, and other liturgical ministers, the adoption of eucharistic vestments for the principal ministers of the liturgy, presider and deacon, is almost universal.

6. A bishop presiding at the eucharist in a rochet and chimere, tippet or stole, is nonsensical in a parish where the presiding clergy would be wearing eucharistic vestments were the bishop not present. If a rochet and chimere is considered “diocesan tradition,” it would appear to be a fairly empty tradition to maintain if the parish clergy would otherwise have presided in eucharistic vestments. It would seem appropriate to wear choir habit for the celebration of the eucharist only in those places where the eucharist continues to be celebrated by the parish clergy in cassock and surplice and tippet/stole, a rarity indeed in most of The Episcopal Church. *One does not wear a miter with a rochet and chimere.*

7. The normative vesture for most episcopal visitations, when the sacraments will be celebrated and when the bishop will preside and preach, is (cassock), alb, stole, chasuble, and miter. (For early rites, simple services, and more informal settings, not wearing a miter should cause no offense.)

8. A word about copes. The classical outer vestment of a bishop when presiding at a eucharist is a chasuble, not a cope. A cope is a ceremonial non-eucharistic vestment, originating for outdoor use (rogation processions, wedding processions, funeral processions, and similar occasions). Their use inside the church for solemn offices, ordinations, and confirmations is more recent, and here’s the point: offices are non-eucharistic occasions and, until the renewal of the initiation rites in recent generations, confirmation was often administered by the bishop at a Sunday or Holy Day office at which the eucharist was not celebrated. The association of “copes and miters” with the presidency of the eucharist can only be dated to the middle of the 19th century in England and the practice there seems to have developed because some bishops desired to “wear something more special” than a magpie, but donning a chasuble was still considered “too papist” in some places. Happily, in The Episcopal Church, those days are over and given the almost universal use of eucharistic vestments among presbyters, there seems to be no reason why bishops should not follow suit. And, practically speaking, chasubles are cooler, less of a hassle when sitting, and in most cases provide much freer use of one’s arms and hands while preaching, praying, and presiding.

9. So when may I wear my beautiful cope? When you’re the presiding bishop and primate at the ordination of a bishop (because the new bishop will preside at the eucharist), when you are a co-consecrator at the ordination of a bishop, at a solemn keeping of the office, at a wedding or funeral when the eucharist is not celebrated (or when someone else is presiding at the table), and other such occasions. For example, at diocesan confirmations assistance is sometimes needed from several bishops for the laying of hands. As a general rule, they wear copes and miters, but the bishop presiding wears a chasuble and miter as the presider at the rites of initiation and at the table.

10. Another positive thing about wearing eucharistic vestments at visitations is that you can travel more lightly. Many bishops have adopted the practice of taking an alb, crosier, and miter, and wearing the vestments that belong to the parish. This has several advantages in addition to not having to lug the stuff around. In the tradition, vestments belong to the church, i.e., to the people, and not to the clergy. (Most clergy have the stole and chasuble they received at ordination, but beyond that there is little need for great closets full of vestments.) By wearing the vestments of the parish, you are identifying with them, they see you as their pastor, and they are delighted that you will wear the gifts that they have offered, however humble. It may be somewhat too big or too little, it may be old and threadbare, or it may be tacky by your personal standards, but it is theirs, as you are theirs. Coming to a struggling intercity parish, or a small rural congregation trying to hold on for dear life, in the resplendent costume of a medieval bishop, should probably be avoided.

Now to the miters

1. As a general rule, bishops need two miters: a gold one and a white one. Nothing further is required.

2. A simple gold miter, largely unadorned, is appropriate for most Sundays, feast days, and other occasions, and will generally go well with vestments of almost any style or color. “Matching” vestments are the invention of the people who make them – Almy, Wippell, Watts, etc. – and our desire to have everything matching is largely a late-20th century triumph of marketing. Matching miters of a variety of colors is unnecessary. The money would be better spent on books.

3. A simple white miter, completely unadorned, is also necessary. White miters are generally worn during Advent and Lent, at simpler rites during the week, and for funerals except in the great fifty days of Easter when gold is always worn.

Now what to do with it

1. There’s a lot of truth to the sage advice, “don’t play with it, and don’t pray with it.” That’s not the whole story, but it is a good place to start.

2. There are lots of variations to consider, especially for simple weekday rites where the miter might be abandoned altogether, or simply worn in and out.

3. Always wear the miter in procession and at any time in the rite where there is significant movement from one place to another, i.e. from the chancel steps to the font.

4. One always wears the miter while seated. An exception to this rule might be at confirmation depending upon what you think is happening there.

5. As a general rule, the miter is put on and taken off while standing.

6. In a typical Sunday liturgy, a classical use of the miter might look something like this:

a. wear the miter during the entrance procession;

b. wear the miter during the censing of the altar, if applicable;

c. wear the miter for the opening acclamation, remove it for the Collect for Purity, the hymn of praise, and the collect of the day. Exception: if the censing of the altar is to take place during the Gloria in excelsis, during Easter for example, then one would wear the miter while censing the altar (and paschal candle).

7. Wear the miter for the readings. Remove it for the gospel and sermon. Retrieve it and put it back on for the Nicene Creed. (Note: When the bishop is present on a Sunday, or for a weekday visitation, it is appropriate to do some form of the renewal of baptismal vows at all services, even those where the rites of initiation will not take place. Using the form on page 292, omitting the words “that our Lenten observance has ended,” provides a good ritual introduction, asks the people to again renounce Satan and his detestable enormities, and provides a fitting conclusion to the rite that is more satisfying than simply stopping.) One wears the miter for the renewal of baptismal vows.

8. The miter is removed for the intercessions and the confession. One wears the miter for the absolution and the peace.

9. The miter is worn for the offertory sentence and during the offertory. It is surrendered when one approaches the altar to receive the gifts, (for censing), and for the celebration. As for what to do with the miter during the celebration, let practicality be your guide. The practice of placing an erect miter on the altar seems fussy in some places but perfectly natural in others. In some contexts the altar is simply too small and the miter will be in the way. If you think about getting the blood of Jesus out of a white miter you will put the miter is the correct location!

10. The miter is not worn during the distribution of Holy Communion even if you’re not serving and you are standing at your chair. It is not worn for the post-communion prayer.

11. Wear the miter for the blessing (if there is one), the dismissal and the procession.

What about confirmation and reception?

1. Wear your miter for the presentation of the candidates, the examination, and the recitation of the baptismal covenant. Remove the miter for the prayer over the candidates and the collect that follows it.

2. Whether or not to wear the miter during confirmation depends largely on what you think you are doing.

a. If you believe that you are actually dispensing something in confirmation or reception that the baptized are lacking, then sit in your chair and wear your miter. If you believe confirmation is something that “the bishop confers” (i.e., adds something to what has already been done), then this is the appropriate way to do it.

b. If, however, you believe that Holy Baptism is full initiation into Christ’s body the church, and that confirmation, reception, and reaffirmation is prayer with apostolic/episcopal hand-laying for the renewal of baptismal life, then stand (the posture of Christian prayer in the liturgy) and take off your miter.

What about ordinations?

1. In general, follow the principles set forth for a regular eucharist.

2. Sit with miter on for the presentation and certification, stand with miter on for the people’s declaration of consent.

3. At the time of the Litany of Ordinations, remove the miter and, if convenient, kneel with the people and the ordinand(s). The miter stays off for the collect(s).

4. An important part of the bishop’s ministry is to preach for ordinations, celebrations of new ministry, and other such occasions. While it is perfectly fine to yield the pulpit from time to time, the assumption of the rites is that the bishop will be the preacher when s/he is present. It is not appropriate for the bishop to give away casually the responsibility for preaching at diocesan and parish liturgies.

5. After the Nicene Creed, the bishop sits with miter on for the examination of the candidate(s).

6. At the time of the *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*, you will do one of two things. What happens depends on your theology of holy orders and whether or not that theology is consonant with the prayer book.

a. If you understand your ministry “to possess” the charisms of diaconate or priesthood and that only you can “confer” such charisms (and here we are speaking sacramentally, not canonically), apart from the church at prayer, then it makes the most sense to remain seated in your chair, continue to wear your miter, and transmit what only you have to the ordinand. In this case the bishop is a dispenser of “used Spirit.”

b. If, however, you believe that the church seeks in prayer a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit for the ordination of a new deacon or priest, and as bishop you ritualize that prayer by the apostolic laying on hands, then stand, as the praying church’s chief pastor, remove your miter, and lead the ordination prayer(s).

7. Note that the ordination prayer is really three prayers: (1) *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (or one of its variants) sung by the assembly, is the first part of the prayer as the church calls for the presence of the Holy Spirit in what is about to happen; (2) the silent prayer of the assembly. This is not simply “a moment of silence.” This is an integral part of the ordination. It is a time (and the people may need to be instructed during the homily or before this part of the rite begins) that during this silence they (the church) are to pray mightily that the Holy Spirit will descend upon the ordinand and make him/her a deacon/priest in the church. This is prayer, not simply quiet time. The great prayer, already at this point somewhat lengthy, then comes to a conclusion (3) with the prayer that the bishop articulates and that includes the laying on of hands. All three of these parts constitute the ordination prayer, not simply the last part that the bishop says alone.

About crosiers

1. The crosier, or pastoral staff, is one of the symbols of the order of bishops. Its use is fairly simple and uncomplicated in normal liturgical usage.

2. Carry the crosier in your left hand unless there is a compelling reason not to do so. Keep your other hand free to greet people, give a blessing, etc. In processions do not try to balance a prayer book or hymnal while trying to walk. It looks awkward and undignified, you’ll probably drop the book, and you can probably remember enough of the hymn to get through the procession without a book.

3. A good rule of thumb is: a crosier is essentially a walking stick. Carry it if you are going somewhere – in and out, to the font, to another part of a large liturgical space if you are going to do something when you get there. Otherwise, plant it and leave it alone. Again, since the crosier is essentially a walking stick, it makes no sense for someone to carry it in front of you. And besides, as this great ministry begins to take its toll on you, you’ll need a walking stick!

4. It is helpful, but not mandatory, to place the crosier in a stand near your chair. Normally the crosier will be on your left when you are seated, but occasionally, because of space constraints, it will need to be located otherwise. If there is not a stand for it, once you have arrived at your chair, a deacon or acolyte (notice the term bishop’s chaplain is not used here) can take it and place it securely in a corner near you or in some other nearby and easily accessible place. As a general rule, putting the crosier on the altar is not recommended unless there are no other convenient options. The altar is itself among the principal symbols in the sacred space and should not be, in most circumstances, a repository for other sacred artifacts. A clash and confusion of symbols is likely to occur.

5. Some will argue that the crosier needs to be next to the bishop during sacramental acts. Some latitude is necessary here. If the crosier is in a stand near your chair, at an ordination, for example, that is sufficient. In earlier English tradition, bishops would often embrace the crosier in the left hand while confirming with the right hand. The rites of The Episcopal Church require the bishop to use both hands so handling the crosier during confirmation is impossible. An acolyte with the crosier shadowing the bishop’s movements during confirmation is probably more cute than symbolically enriching and in many liturgical spaces they are simply in your way.

6. During a normal eucharistic liturgy, the bishop welcomes the crosier during the reading of the gospel, at the absolution, and at the time of the blessing (if there is one).

Of Pectoral Crosses

1. In the great tradition, pectoral crosses are among the symbols unique to the order of bishop and given to the bishop at ordination. Pectoral crosses are not worn by deacons or priests.

2. One generally wears one’s pectoral cross with a cassock, with a rochet and chimere, and when wearing a cope.

3. Normative use is to wear the pectoral cross under the chasuble when presiding. Normal practice appears to be wearing the pectoral cross on top of the chasuble. At the very least, some caution should be exercised. A pectoral cross worn on top of a simple, unadorned chasuble poses little problem. However, a pectoral cross, worn on top of an elaborate vestment, particularly if they are of contrasting styles, calls attention to itself and is often distracting.

4. With street wear, it is customary for the pectoral cross to be placed in the left breast pocket. The reasons for this are several: (1) it is more secure there; (2) placing the cross in the breast pocket takes the weight off the cords and chains and extends their useful life; (3) your left breast pocket is over your heart. No exegesis required for that. All that to the contrary, western bishops have sometimes been criticized by their counterparts in other parts of the world for this custom. It appears to those of other cultures that we are ashamed of the cross and that we are hiding it so that others will not know we are Christians. You can make of that what you want, but having encountered such feelings in other parts of the world, I confess that I have become more sensitive to whether the cross is in or out of my pocket, depending on the context.

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